TO THE VIRGINS, TO MAKE MUCH OF TIME.  
By Robert Herrick

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| GATHER ye rosebuds while ye may,      Old time is still a-flying :  And this same flower that smiles to-day      To-morrow will be dying.  The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,      The higher he's a-getting, The sooner will his race be run,      And nearer he's to setting.  That age is best which is the first,      When youth and blood are warmer ;  But being spent, the worse, and worst      Times still succeed the former.  Then be not coy, but use your time,      And while ye may go marry :  For having lost but once your prime      You may for ever tarry. |

Nathan Brinling

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Explication

During childhood, it is difficult to realize that every day is precious and time is limited. There is a limited amount of time that people have to live. As a person gets older, certain tasks become harder to accomplish. “Carpe Diem” literally translates to seize the day. Wasting time is a terrible mistake because time is invaluable and can never be taken back. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” urges youth to start living their lives as if today is their last day to live. The poem “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” uses allusion, metaphor, and rhyme to explain that if one wastes their youth, they may never receive the same opportunities as when they were young.

In the poem, there are many metaphors that help to better communicate the idea of carpe diem. The first line says, “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may” (1). Rosebuds are a metaphor for youth. The narrator is saying that while one is still young, one should accomplish everything he or she still can. The rosebuds will only be around for so long, and the narrator is telling a woman to seize the moments that they have together. In lines three and four, the poem says “And this same flower that smiles to-day / To-morrow will be dying” (3-4). This flower is a metaphor for beauty. Beauty only lasts for a limited time and while it is here, the narrator suggests that they he and the virgin make the most out of the time they have together. In the second stanza, the sun is a metaphor for life. The sun’s course of a day shows the passing of time. The poem compares the rising sun to birth and the setting sun to death. This metaphor is effective because anyone can compare to the sun’s rising. The rosebuds and the sun are effective metaphors that help describe how precious time is in life.

Allusion is a very effective way to help give the poem depth and meaning. The first line of the poem, “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may” is the same line which appears at end of the poem “De rosis nascentibus” by Ausonius (1). The poem by Ausonius asks a young woman to enjoy herself before she grows old. The main theme of “De rosis nascentibus” is carpe diem. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” is also an allusion to the ten virgins in the Bible chapter Matthew 25:1-13. In Matthew, bridesmaids waited for their groom with oil lamps. Some of the foolish bridesmaids did not put oil in their lamps and fell asleep. Those who stayed up were ready to leave with the groom when he appeared, leaving the sleeping bridesmaids behind. The moral of this story of Matthew is that the bridesmaids who were prepared seized the moment. Those who fell asleep overlooked an important moment in their lives. Allusions to the Bible and to Ausonius help add depth and meaning to the poem.

Rhyme is used as a literary device several times in this poem. There are many uses of exact rhyme. In every stanza, exact rhyme is used for the last word in the first and third lines. The poem uses exact rhyme in the last words of the second and fourth lines. The most important use of exact rhyme can be seen in the last stanza. The last words in the thirteenth and fifteenth line are “time” and “prime” (13, 15). The poem says that in the prime of life one should make the most out of the opportunities they are given. This is important advice to follow in order to live a fulfilled and happy life. The last words in the fourteenth and sixteenth line are “marry” and “tarry” (14, 16). This line helps explain that there should be no delay in taking action. This last stanza helps bring the poem to a conclusion. Rhyme helps make the poem entertaining to read and give the poem meaning. The poem ends with idea that while one is young and in their prime, they should make the most of the time that they have.

“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” is a poem about seizing the moment. Metaphor, allusion, and rhyme are all used effectively to enforce the idea that moments spent in childhood is precious. The poem is much more than a man convincing a woman to sleep with him. The poem describes many of the opportunities that are sometimes overlooked in life. The message of the poem is to not waste youth. Seize the important moments of life while in the prime of life.

Works Cited

Herrick, Robert. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.” Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense. Ninth ed. Ed. Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson. Belmont, CA:

